

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01
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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3792
INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN
AMEMBASSY NASSAU
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 0318

DEPT PASS USIA FOR ILA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SOPN, SCUL, PROP, JM

SUBJECT: JAMAICA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A
FREE PRESS

1. SUMMARY: IN THE COURSE OF HIS ADDRESS ON JAN 19
REGARDING JAMAICA'S ECONOMIC CRISIS, PRIME MINISTER MANLEY
ANNOUNCED THE GOVERNMENT'S IMPENDING TAKEOVER OF RJR, THE
ISLAND'S INDEPENDENT RADIO NETWORK. TAKEN WITH OTHER
RECENT EXAMPLES OF GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IN THE MEDIA,
THIS WILL LEAVE THE GLEANER THE ONLY FORUM FOR VIGOROUS,
NON-PARTISAN CRITICISM OF GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE AND IT,
TOO, WILL BECOME INCREASINGLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO CONTROL, IF
ONLY INDIRECTLY. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER MANLEY TOLD PARLIAMENT ON JANUARY 19
THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS NEGOTIATING TO ACQUIRE A
MAJORITY INTEREST IN THE PRIVATELY-OWNED (BRITISH)
INDEPENDENT RADIO NETWORK, RJR. THE SHARES ARE TO
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BE ACQUIRED INITIALLY BY THE GOJ-OWNED WORKERS BANK
TRUST COMPANY AND WILL LATER BE TRANSFERRED TO
"PEOPLE-BASED" ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS " THE WORKERS
OF THE RADIO STATION, THE JAMAICA AGRICULTURAL
SOCIETY, JAMAICA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, BOTH MAJOR UNIONS
AND SIMILAR ORGANIZATIONS". TOGETHER WITH IT'S DE
FACTO, IF NOT DE JURE, CONTROL OF THE PUBLICLY-

OWNED JAMAICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION TELEVISION AND RADIO FACILITIES, THIS WILL ASSURE THAT NOTHING IS BROADCAST IN JAMAICA WITHOUT AT LEAST THE ASSENT OF THE GOVERNMENT.

3. THE DAILY NEWS, WHICH HAS SINCE ITS INCEPTION BEEN LESS CRITICAL, IF NOT UNCRITICAL, OF THE PNP GOVERNMENT IS NOW UNDER THE EDITORSHIP OF CANUTE JAMES. JAMES, AS PRESIDENT OF THE PRESS ASSOCIATION OF JAMAICA, HAS LED THAT ORGANIZATION INTO AFFILIATION WITH THE LEFT-WING LATIN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS AND TO SUBSCRIPTION TO A CODE OF ETHICS WHICH SAYS, IN PART, "WHERE THERE IS CONFLICT BETWEEN THE NEWS MEDIA'S OR JOURNALISTS' RIGHTS AND THE COMMUNITY'S INTEREST, THE LATTER SHALL PREVAIL". JAMES SEES THE "COMMUNITY INTEREST" AS DEFINED BY THE GOVERNMENT, AND HIS EDITORSHIP HAS REFLECTED AND WILL CONTINUE TO REFLECT THAT FACT. OPPOSITION TO AND CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT WILL THEREFOR BE LIMITED TO THE WEEKLY VOICE OF JAMAICA AND THE GLEANER. THE VOICE, THE OFFICIAL PAPER OF THE OPPOSITION JLP, HAS A CIRCULATION OF 19,000 AND LITTLE INFLUENCE.

4. THE GLEANER WILL, UNDER THE NEW AUSTERITY PROGRAM, BE DEPENDENT UPON THE GOVERNMENT FOR IMPORT LICENSES AND ALLOCATION OF FOREIGN CURRENCY FOR THE PURCHASE OF NEWSPRINT AND FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE ALLOCATIONS TO CONTINUE THEIR SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE U.S. BASED
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NEWS SERVICES (AP, OPLEY NEWS SERVICE AND NANA) UPON WHICH THEY DEPEND HEAVILY FOR THEIR NON-JAMAICAN INPUT. IN ADDITION, THERE WERE SEVERAL REFERENCES IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH WEDNESDAY NIGHT THAT INDICATE HIS GOVERNMENT'S INTENTION TO SEEK A FURTHER, DOUBTLESS LENGTHY EXTENSION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY IN EFFECT SINCE LAST JUNE. UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS, " THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY " (POLICE COMMISSIONER AND DEFENSE FORCE COMMANDER) HAS THE POWER TO IMPOSE CENSORSHIP. ALTHOUGH THE GLEANER SUCCESSFULLY DEFIED " THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY " WHEN IT IMPOSED A PRE-PUBLICATION CENSORSHIP ON POLITICAL STATEMENTS IN THE THREE DAYS BEFORE THE DECEMBER 15TH ELECTIONS, THE GLEANER'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN THIS ATTITUDE IN THE FUTURE WILL BE HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE CONSIDERATIONS ABOVE.

5. ASIDE FROM THE ABOVE PROBLEMS, GLEANER EDITOR

OLIVER CLARKE TOLD THE AMBASSADOR JANUARY 19 THAT
ADVERTISING AND OTHER REVENUE HAS DECLINED TO
THE POINT WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE THE GLEANER MAY NOT
SURVIVE IN ANY EVENT BEYOND THE END OF THIS YEAR.
CLARKE ALSO MENTIONED THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT
GOJ COULD CUT OFF HIS NEWSPAPER'S NEWSPRINT SUPPLY.
GERARD

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